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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2753  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7347  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1375  
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,  
IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Palestinian Territories, Peace  
Process, Lebanon, Iraq, US Midterm Elections (11/8)

¶1. Summary: The Syrian press today focused on the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories in light of the recent Israeli escalation, especially in Beit Hanoun. Papers reported Foreign Minister Mouallem's meeting with Khalid Mish'al, Chief of HAMAS' Political Bureau, and Dr. Ahmad Bahar, Deputy Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which focused on developments in the occupied territories. FM Mouallem confirmed Syria's support of the Palestinian people and their national options, especially the formation of a national unity government to strengthen Palestinian cohesion.

Papers also reported that Abdullah al-Ahmar, Assistant Secretary General of the Ba'th Party, received Hanna Afif Omera, Member of the Politburo of the Palestinian People's Party, and Bassam Zaki Ahmed Mosleh, Director General of the Party. Talks dealt with the tough circumstances in which the Palestinian people are living under the Israeli occupation and its continuous aggressions and practices against the unarmed Palestinian people. Al-Ahmar underlined Syria's support for the Palestinians' resistance and struggle to restore their occupied lands, freedom and legitimate rights by establishing a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as capital and realizing the Palestinian refugees' right of return. He also confirmed Syria's keenness for Palestinian national unity within the framework of the PLO as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Headlines featured a sit-in tent at the Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian Refugees near Damascus, showing solidarity with the Palestinian people of Beit Hanoun in Gaza strip. Participants held Palestinian flags and placards condemning Israeli genocide against Palestinian civilians. They called for continuing resistance until usurped rights are restored, appealing to Arab governments to play their role in supporting the Palestinian cause.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"Foreign Minister al-Mouallem stresses Syria's support for formation of a Palestinian national unity government, in a meeting with Khalid Mish'al chief of the HAMAS Political Bureau" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/8)

"Al-Ahmar discusses with the Palestinian People's Party party relations and Palestinians' suffering under occupation, reiterating Syria's concern about Palestinian national unity on the basis of the Palestinian Reconciliation Charter" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th,

11/8)

"Abbas and Hanieh continue talks on a national unity government. The Israeli massacre reaps 360 martyrs and casualties in Beit Hanoun" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/8)

"Participants at the sit-in tent in al-Yarmouk camp for Palestinian refugees: Stop Israeli massacres against the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/8)

"The 1st International Media Forum on the Golan emphasizes the Syrian people's right to resist occupation. Information Minister Mohsen Bilal: The occupation of Golan is a crime against humanity and the ugliest kind of terrorism.... No option for Israel but withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 line" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/8)

"The Lebanese democratic gathering breaks off for consultations. Berri: We are still discussing a national unity government. Lebanese MP Hassan Fadlallah: America fears for its project in Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/8)

"Iraqi factions denounce assaults against mosques, holding the Iraqi government responsible. Killing of two US and British soldiers in Baghdad and Basra" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/8)

"US Democratic candidates head towards winning the majority in the US Congress" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/8)

"Americans elect a new Congress and 36 governors. The death verdict against Saddam is Bush's sole weapon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/8)

### 3. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"A Cause that Cannot Be Ignored"  
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Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (11/8): "International statements about the need for peace in the Middle East appear to be wishful thinking more than a serious effort to achieve peace....

"The narrow window of opportunity for peace, which Syria has talked

about, can be widened if there is a serious international effort to end the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and force Israel to comply with UN resolutions.... It is inconceivable to ask Syria to play a constructive role as long as its territory is occupied.... The Golan is one of the most important issues in Syrian policy.... It is a top priority in Syrian policy.

"Returning the Golan is a clear Syrian message proceeding from solid patriotic and national bases and relying on the logic of justice, law and UN resolutions and the terms of reference of the 1991 Madrid conference, which was launched on the basis of the exchange of land for peace....

"Syria has explained its position and desire for peace to all visiting European delegations.... The ball is now in the court of the concerned parties, whether in the United States, which has backtracked from the peace process and helped Israel foil it, or in the European countries, which are adopting a timid position toward the Israeli occupation and frequently taking the side of the American position, on the agenda of which there is no such thing as peace....

"Syria has conveyed facts and requirements of the region objectively and transparently to others. Now it wants clear answers to its call to achieve peace and end the aggression and occupation."

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"A Test for Bush"  
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Isam Dari, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/18): "Results of the midterm election will be decisive for President Bush, the Republican Party, and the neoconservative team, which is leading the president, the party, the country, and the rest of the world to disaster and destruction....

"Many Americans have shifted support from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party.... The futile terrorist wars that seek to impose the American will on the world have burdened the American economy. The taxpayer has found that he is paying taxes not for domestic reform or for the development of the economy and the improvement of the standard of living. A large part of the taxpayer's money goes to feed preemptive wars promoted and planned by the neoconservatives. Moreover, the coffins returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the feelings of hatred toward the United States in the world, have made the American taxpayer realize, although late, that the Bush administration is not only leading the world to destruction but also leading Americans to a multifaceted disaster,

part of which is internal, social and economic and part of which is external, represented by growing hatred toward everything American -- not only American policies -- by the nations of the world....  
"It appears that Americans today want to correct this situation, not out of love for the Democratic Party or out of a desire to serve the world and ask forgiveness from peoples, but in order to make domestic accomplishments reflecting on the life of Americans...."

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"Awaiting Results of Election"

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Ali Qasem, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (11/8): "Foreign policy dominates the US midterm Congressional elections for the first time in decades.... The world is awaiting the results of the elections because they will determine the performance of President Bush's administration in the next two years...."

"The big mistakes that the US Administration has made, especially as seen in Iraq, have given the Democrats the necessary ammunition to launch a fierce attack on the Republican Party.... The world will soon see if the US voter has realized the deception that the US Administration has practiced in international issues, a deception that has reflected negatively on Americans...."

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"Iraq in the US Congressional Elections"

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Bassam Radwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (11/8): "The war on Iraq and the policy of President Bush's administration in that country will probably be the decisive factor in the midterm elections.... The death sentence against former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein came only two days before the elections...."

"Irrespective of the details and circumstances of Saddam's trial and the extent of justice in it, the way it ended undoubtedly indicates that it is being used to serve Republicans in the midterm

Congressional elections after the Bush administration tried hard to evade the price of its military defeats...."  
Corbin